1983-10-29
The News and Advance (p.17)

Staff photos by Mark Bailey

Minds in the mountains

Scientist and author Robert Monroe founded his institute in 1979 in the mountains of Nelson County. The institute's buildings line a ridgetop behind him, above. Inside, he works with equipment his process employs to transmit audio signals aimed at inducing higher state of consciousness in the hundreds of people who come to the institute each year.

Believers building a new community

By SUSAN GARBEE BRANDT
Staff Writer

NELLYSFORD — Just west of the institute's three educational buildings, Robert A. Monroe envisions 50 families living in a community within five years.

Already 14 houses, mostly passive solar, are under construction. Of the 64 parcels available, 43 have been sold, Monroe said.

The development is called the New Land and the property-owners, the New Landers.

Almost all of the New Landers have been through Monroe's program, and some work or are affiliated with the institute.

They were lured to build on the 800 acres for many of the reasons that Monroe bought the land in 1979.

In addition to the breathtaking view of mountain peaks, Monroe said he chose the land because it is fairly free of noise, air and water pollution.

The New Landers include a mixture of retired people, young married couples, some who have young children, and middle-aged couples with high school age children, David Mulvey, president of the New Land Association, said.

Mulvey, a former WDBJ—TV reporter in the Lynchburg bureau, and his wife, Kathryn, a former Randolph-Macon Woman's College newswriter, bought land here shortly after going through Monroe's week-long program.

"My wife and I always wanted to build a house of our own out in the country for semi-selfsufficient living. Instead of trying to do it by ourselves, we do it with the community," Mulvey said.

Mulvey said he's received help from other New Landers in constructing his houses, which he and his wife designed.

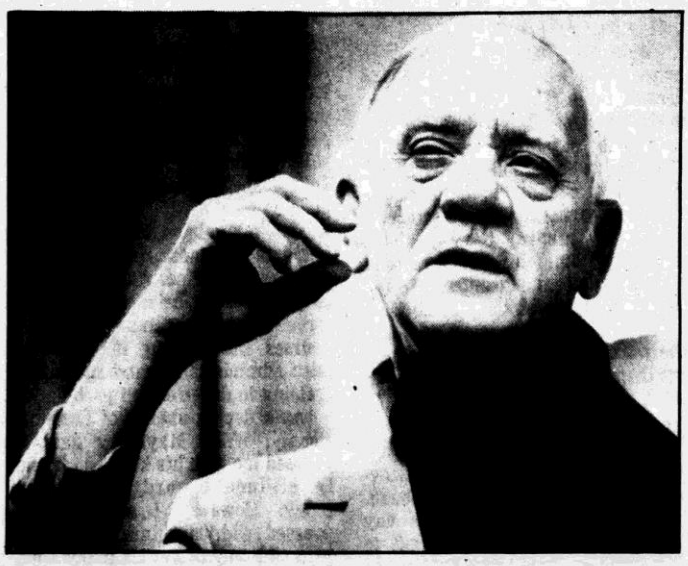
The Tennessee native said his family has been supportive of his move to the New Land. "I have a couple of brothers and sisters interested in this and they've been very supportive. Another brother didn't know what to think. It's sort of a thing that someone has to decide for themselves - whether to search for experiences like this."

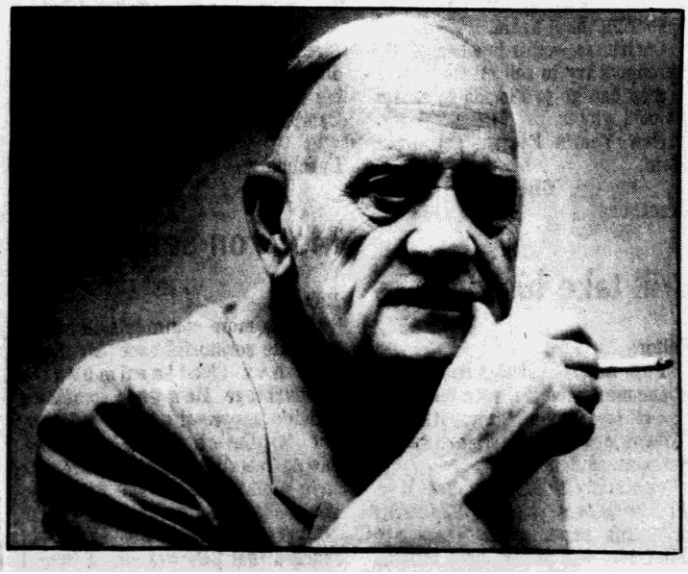
At the institute, there are no newspapers, magazines or television available to program participants because the institute staff believes they would distract participants.

Mulvey said he has a radio and watches television, although "since Gateway I've found them not to be as important as they were at one time."

Mulvey said after he finishes the house he will look for a job outside the institute.

The New Land eventually will include a passive-solar heated greenhouse for community vegetables and an alcohol fuel plant, Monroe said.





Monroe's methods convince Tacoma

By SUSAN GARBEE BRANDT
Staff Writer

Two months into the first semester, first graders in a Tacoma, Wash., public school class already have developed writing skills they normally wouldn't have mastered until next summer.

That's because the six-year-olds listen daily to music laced with Robert A. Monroe's "hemi-sync" process while they learn. Monroe received a patent in 1975 on the process, which enables the student to use both halves of his brain for accelerated learning.

Emma Snead, principal of Ruston Elementary School in Tacoma, said, "At present their writing is where a students is at the end of the year. ...They are highly motivated to do their writing assignments."

Devon Edrington, a philosophy professor at the Tacoma Community College, created the music for the public schools using Monroe's process. He has worked with Monroe for five years.

"They are writing their own complete sentences and spelling correctly," Edrington said.

He works with Monroe because, "Bob's just way ahead of other people doing research in this area. His patented method is nothing short of amazing."

At the Monroe Institute of Applied Science in Nellysford, Monroe uses stereo headphones to play the hemi-sync pulses. Edrington has modified Monroe's approach and is using a speaker system instead. "That's awkward in public schools ... you can't string 30 head phones.

"I make up tapes masking Bob's special sounds with music and try to pick music that is soothing and appropriate with the grade level we are dealing with. This music is played at a low volume during class. It sounds, to the innocent bystander ... like Muzak. It's the buried hemi-sync sounds that really do the work."

Edrington said the music is turned off periodically so the students will learn to create the high level awareness state without using the tapes.

"They learn to get into this state. They learn what it feels like to be able to focus their attention. They don't need the tape after awhile."

Edrington said hemi-sync was used in a pilot program in the 28,000-student Tacoma schools for a short time, and will be used in the first grade class all year this year.

Edrington said the school system is considering using hemi-sync in other classes. He added, "We have no hard data on use in the public school. We are in the process of gathering such data now."

Ms. Snead said she hasn't heard of hemi-sinc. She said she doesn't know how the accelerated learning process works.

"Whatever it is, it's doing a fantastic job," she said.

Nelson group researching brain waves

By SUSAN GARBEE BRANDT
Staff Writer

NELLYSFORD — The research of the Monroe Institute of Applied Sciences here has attracted thousands from foreign countries and across the nation since it was formed in 1979.

Yet very few people in the Lynchburg area know anything about the brain-wave research of the 800-acre institute, just off Virginia 6 in Nelson County.

Few know the institute's research has enabled Tacoma, Wash., public school six-year olds to master skills they shouldn't develop until spring.

Or that the institute's patented sound process is being used to control pain in illness and surgery, and help insomniacs sleep, stroke victims recover and tennis players and golfers play better.

Nor do they know anything about the founder, Robert A. Monroe, who says that in 1958 his mind began leaving his body and traveling across the country, other universes and into the unknown.

Most Nelson County residents either don't know the institute exists or have heard one of many rumors about the place.

"I don't think the neighbors have any idea what goes on here," Nancy Honeycutt, Monroe's stepdaughter, said. "They know we deal with brain waves. They assume we are doing weird things to people's minds."

Shortly after Monroe wrote "Journeys Out of the Body," which details his out-of-body experiences, he left his broadcasting career and began full-time research on what causes a person's mind to leave the physical body and travel.

Monroe, then a prominent broadcasting executive listed in Who's Who in America, said his book helped him get out of the broadcasting business. More than 200,000 copies of the book, which is printed in six foreign languages, have been sold.

In his research, Monroe, 68, said he found that an out-of-body experience was one of many produced by various states of consciousness. Those states can be controlled through complex patterns of audio signals, he said.

In 1975, Monroe received a patent on "audio-technology" that allows the use and development of both halves of the brain.

His process uses audio pulses to create electrical signals in the brain. Slightly different signals are sent to each ear, and the difference between the two produces various states of consciousness, ranging from sleep to out-of-body, Monroe said. The process is called hemispheric synchronization, of "hemi-sync."

After conducting consciousness programs and research across the country, he moved from Albemarle County to Nelson County and formed the institute in 1979.

At the non-profit institute here in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Monroe and other institute employees teach others in an $850 seven-day program.

They use a series of taped exercises to explore higher states of consciousness.

"Some discover themselves for the first time, and thus live more completely, more constructively. Others reach levels of awareness so profound that only one such experience is enough for a lifetime. Still others become seekers-after-truth and add on ongoing adventure to their daily activity," Monroe writes in one of his brochures.

Twenty to 25 percent of Monroe program participants have an out-of-body experience while they are at the institute or shortly after the leave, Ms. Honeycutt, who works at the institute, said.

"Out of body is not the thrust experience," she said. The same energy used to create an out-of-body experience is used for other experiences.

The purpose of the seven-day program is "to expand one's awareness," Ms. Honeycutt said.

"Within seven days, you can watch people change dramatically. ... We watch them open up like flowers," she said. "Their belief system is challenged. They may recall something they didn't remember from child-

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hood."

She said one woman who had spent 10 years in therapy trying to learn why she had ill feelings toward her father discovered that he had abused her as a young child.

Some of the more famous people Monroe's institute has attracted include actor Eddie Albert and Elisabeth-Kubler Ross, who as an author has detailed her out-of-body experiences. Monroe said actor Jon Voight went through one of the sessions in California.

More than 3,000 people have been through one of Monroe's programs.

He doesn't advertise. "People find out about us by word of mouth," Ms. Honeycutt said.

Although the institute is listed in the Nelson County phone book there are no signs on Virginia 6.

In a session this month, four of the 15 participants were from West Germany, one was from India and others were from the Northwest, Midwest and California.

Participants spend most of their day in what is called a Controlled Holistic Environmental Chamber. The chambers, included in each of the participant's rooms, resemble paneled alcoves, equipped with an air mattress, lights, sophisticated stereo speakers and headphones.

Most of the days, which begin at 6 a.m., are spent in the chamber listening to Monroe's tapes. Participants hold a group meeting after listening to each 45-minute tape to talk about their experiences.

The participants listen to "hemi-sync" recordings that send sound pulses to each ear through stereo headphones.

The seven-day sessions are known as the Gateway program because "we realized we are creating a gateway to people to other areas of consciousness, to other areas of themselves," Monroe said.

Those who go through the Gateway Program can become professional members of the institute for $250 a year. Special tapes and information exchanges with other members are available to professional members.

Monroe said at least a third of those who go through the Gateway program are "psychologists, M.D.s, academics, teachers, professors, who come to learn the methods and apply them in their own practice."

In the next five years, Monroe envisions that 50 families who have gone through the Gateway program will build houses on the institute's grounds.

He's reserved a spot for his own house on top of the mountain on the property.

He also plans to build dormitories and facilities for college students who want to come here to study toward a doctorate in consciousness.

"They will use our facilties to conduct studies using our methods to gather material for a doctorate."

Monroe appears excited when he discusses the Tacoma school program, the sleep program, the stroke recovery program, the New Landers or the college-level courses.

"We like to say we discovered (hemi-sync)," he said. "We put it into practice. It offers so much promise. You wouldn't begin to imagine."

Although much of his research is devoted to developing uses for various consciousness states, Monroe continues to pursue his out-of-body experiences.

However, he said, he got to the point several years ago where he was bored with "hopping between here and California ..."

"I turned the applications of ... the use of this ability to my total self or soul," he said.

He said his experiences have gone beyond his expectations. "I moved into this state of being I didn't know existed."

He declined to elaborate. He said his experiences are detailed in his next book to be published at the end of the year.

Those who are curious will have to read the book. He calls it "Far Journeys."